Wizards Ends Their Relationship with Terese Nielsen

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Thursday evening on Weekly MTG, Wizards of the Coast revealed that they have apparently ended their relationship with controversial artist Terese Nielsen.

"We haven't commissioned new art from Terese Nielsen in quite a while," said Doug Beyer, Principal Game Designer on the Worldbuilding team for Magic: the Gathering. "The last product that will have any reprint art from her is this Fall with Zendikar Rising."

Beyer's statement is Wizards of the Coast's first acknowledgement of the controversy surrounding Nielsen. It came on the same day that it was revealed that Nielsen will have at least three cards in *Jumpstart*, Magic's newest supplemental product, with her art: Death's Approach, Hunter's Insight, and Rhystic Study. Many in the Magic community were upset that Wizards was continuing to use Nielsen's work after the information that has surfaced throughout 2018 and 2019.

A sampling of alt-right, conspiracy-driven accounts that Nielsen followed on Twitter.

Nielsen, who lives in Carson City, NV with her wife, was one of Magic's most popular artists and began illustrating cards in 1996's Alliances expansion set. But in 2018, people noticed that Nielsen had been following members of the alt-right and conspiracy theorists on Twitter. Those follows ranged from alt-right activists like Mike Cernovich and Jack Posobiec, to InfoWars—home of conspiracy theorist and Sandy Hook denier Alex Jones—and the white nationalist Stefan Molyneux.

She was also found to have liked a number of racist tweets that spouted anti-Semitic theories and made memes about white power.

Some of the racist and conspiracy-laden tweets Nielsen liked on Twitter.

When all of that was brought to light, she unfollowed many of those accounts and unliked the offending tweets. However, the controversy would not die down, and it resurfaced a year later in April 2019, at which time she issued a long statement on Twitter.

“Being excommunicated from a community and ostracized by family for following my convictions is not new to me,” Nielsen wrote. “The Magic community has blessed me and taught me in a myriad of ways in the past 25 years…I embrace the fact that many different viewpoints can, do, and should co-exist. In these stressful times, it is my intent to navigate in harmony with my core values (beauty, compassion, love) to the best of my ability without any need or desire to stifle, censor or demean another for differently held viewpoints.”

Many found her statement vague and underwhelming, especially because it didn’t address her alleged trans-exclusionary beliefs. Nielsen later posted a second statement celebrating pride month, saying: “Just so nothing I have expressed thus far can possibly be misunderstood…for the record, I support human rights, trans rights, gay rights, as well as religious freedom and the sacredness of life in all forms.”

Just a few months later, Nielsen’s work ended up on the racist, QAnon and conspiracy-focused YouTube channel Edge of Wonder. The show posted a video on July 12, 2019 in which the co-hosts present art prints that Nielsen had gifted them.

Nielsen's gifted work is displayed on an episode of Edge of Wonder.

"So, a painter sent us these," Rob Counts says in the video. "Terese Nielsen. She sent us all of these paintings and they're actually incredible."

"And signed them!" replies co-host Ben Chasteen.

Despite the building body of evidence that Nielsen held fringe views, Wizards didn't make any public statements about the situation while the community grew increasingly uneasy. When Nielsen was given another card in June 2019's Modern Horizons set, Echo of Eons, Wizards still hadn't given any indication that they aware of the community's concerns.

Then, in November of that year, controversy bubbled over once again at Mythic Championship VI. Autumn Burchett, winner of Mythic Championship I the first non-binary player to win a major tournament, wrote "NO TERFS ON GRUUL TURF!" on their (very expensive) Guru Forest and Island that feature artwork by Nielsen. (TERF stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminist and is often used to describe people who do not believe that trans women are women.) Burchett tweeted that Wizards asked them to remove those lands from their deck, causing an uproar in the Magic community as it appeared that Wizards was trying to stifle a very public criticism of Nielsen and her views.

Burchett's modified guru lands.

Nielsen proceeded to fade into the background as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entire world. Attention turned the delay of *Ikoria: Lair of Behemoths'* release and the cancellation of Magic's entire 2020 in-person schedule, from MagicFests to the Players Tour and Mythic Invitationals. On Memorial Day, George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, MN, generating waves of protest in the United States that dominated the headlines. The protests forced companies like Wizards to acknowledge how unwelcome many minorities felt in its game, resulting in the banning of seven cards for their racist depictions and an acknowledgement that "[t]here's much more work to be done as we continue to make our games, communities, and company more inclusive."

A week later came the beginning of Jumpstart's preview season—and the revelation that Nielsen would once again have cards with her art appear in a brand new Magic set.

"We hear you," Beyer said Thursday. The implication of his words—that "the last product that will have any reprint art" from Nielsen will be in Zendikar Rising, combined with the fact that they "haven't commissioned any new art from [her] in quite a while"—is that Wizards has stopped working with Nielsen and will cease printing cards with her art. When Hipsters reached out to Wizards for confirmation, they declined to comment any further.